



[bedrock buzz]

Friday
6-13-25

NEWS OF THE 22ND REGULAR CONVENTION OF THE MID-SOUTH DISTRICT, LCMS — JUNE 12-14, 2025

What a Blessing to Worship Together!

Before official business of the 22nd Regular Convention of the Mid-South District got underway, delegates, guests and other attendees gathered for a beautiful and inspiring opening worship service, hosted by Christ the King Lutheran Church and School. The convention theme, "Christ, the Church's One Foundation," was a fitting inspiration for the message of guest preacher, LCMS First Vice President, Rev. Peter K. Lange. As his sermon emphasized, Christ is not just the foundation, but the one foundation, needing no other enhancements, caveats, or "add-ons." The worship experience was elevated by beautiful hymns and music, all echoing the reassuring theme.

The worship offering for the evening was designated for the Mid-South District's fund to assist current pastors and commissioned workers burdened with education debt. The total included special offerings collected by the delegates' congregations prior to the convention, resulting in just over \$4,045 for this essential fund.

Prior to worship, Christ the King hosted a wonderful meal in the church's fellowship hall, sponsored by Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF). All in attendance enjoyed the time of fellowship—and the delicious food! Many thanks to Christ the King for hosting an evening of excellence, setting the perfect tone for the 2025 Mid-South District Convention.



ELECTION NEWS: Paavola Retains District Presidency

Congratulations to Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, who was re-elected Friday morning to a fifth term as President of the Mid-South District. "God be praised," Paavola shared with the delegation following the announcement of the voting results. Selected from among a slate of six candidates following two rounds of voting, President Paavola thanked the men who had also allowed their names to stand, acknowledging the fellow candidates as "...good friends, great pastors, and that's what makes this district great."

FAITH IN ACTION: MSD Disaster Relief Ministry Responds During Record-Breaking Season

PART 1 of a Feature by Judy Otto, Editor of the Lutheran Witness Mid-South District Supplement

It's not your imagination: dangerous weather has been worse recently. According to the Climate Cosmos website, the spring of 2025 has been exceptionally active for severe weather, with a record-breaking 1,200 tornadoes reported in the U.S. by early May—"a number not seen since the infamous 2011 season."

The frequency of wind gusts over 70 mph has doubled compared to the spring average, toppling trees and power lines in St. Louis and Nashville. Memphis has recorded more than double its average rainfall for April and May, and flash flooding reports are commonplace, with the Mississippi River reaching levels not seen in more than a decade. Insurance companies estimate that insured losses from tornadoes, hail, and flooding will have reached over \$15 billion nationwide by the end of May, with more claims expected as damage assessments continue.*

The need for a disaster relief ministry has never been greater, nor more appreciated, as Rev. Trae Fistler (Faith, Hopkinsville, KY) and Kurt Ludwig, (Grace, Clarksville, TN), co-coordinators of the Mid-South District program, have discovered.

EVOLUTION OF THE DISTRICT'S MINISTRY

Fistler and his team were recruited in 2021 by then District Disaster Response Coordinator (DDRC) Jan Simko. Rather than relying on other districts and RSO's like Lutheran Church Charities when a natural disaster struck, they decided to go through Missouri Synod's Lutheran Early Response Training (LERT) class taught by Simko.

"My congregation loved it, and thought it was a good way that we could help out," says Fistler. "When the time came to get some equipment financed jointly by Synod and the District, Jan identified us as the District team that had been the most active in responding to calls.

"It was a big undertaking," he recalls. "Before we started investing in things, we had to research which machines and equipment were the

right size and horsepower for the amount and type of work we would have to do.

"The skidsteer loader (SSL) we purchased cost \$43,000 at the time,



¹<https://climatecosmos.com/climate-news/why-spring-2025-has-been-exceptionally-active-for-severe-weather-6zmv5/>

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Hors d'oeuvres - Drinks - Fellowship

and we had to acquire an almost \$10,000 trailer to move it around. We also had to invest in chainsaws and supporting equipment like files and chains. The Christ the King team in Memphis gifted us with a small enclosed trailer that had gone unused for some time, so we had another way to transport all the ropes and chains and other gear.”

When first-time volunteers completed the basic LERT class, chainsaw operators then took an 8-hour class that began with safety and skills instruction from an experienced instructor, and concluded with 4 hours of hands-on practice using a chainsaw to cut down unwanted trees like the aging pines on church property that were dropping limbs on power lines, Fistler explained.

After participating in a number of disaster response deployments, Fistler was selected to attend a chainsaw instructor class that prepared him to train other chainsaw operators (sawyers). The class was taught by senior chainsaw instructors overseen by the Synod office of Disaster Response. Fistler was one of only five students in his class of 15 to be recommended to continue as an instructor candidate.

There’s a lot to learn—including the added level of risk in using chainsaws for disaster work: “Trees that are damaged by storms are ten times more dangerous than those that tree workers deal with on a normal day, because of all the twists and splits and cracks in the wood. Safely felling such trees is much more challenging.”

After another full year of training as an instructor, Fistler officially became a trainer himself in August 2024 and has been busier than ever. “We have 12 chainsaw trainers across all of Synod, and I’m the only one in our district. I’m also assisting the Southern District and the Indiana District with chainsaw classes, since both districts are without trainers.”

Initially the team was formed of 16 LERT volunteers from Hopkinsville and also included members of Ludwig’s congregation at Grace, Clarksville, Tenn. A dozen of those volunteers completed chainsaw training.

“We started picking up additional volunteers through the years with Basic LERT,” says Fistler, “and when I became a chainsaw instructor, I was able to train up additional LERT volunteers from my congregation in Hopkinsville as well as the one in Clarksville.”

Kurt Ludwig joined the team after responding to a notice in the Grace, Clarksville church bulletin requesting help to clear away brush and debris from a congregation member’s property. Although he’d used a chainsaw since he was a kid in Wisconsin, LERT safety protocols prevented him from doing more than dragging brush until he took the Basic LERT and chainsaw classes. He filled out the forms, but when he arrived for the chainsaw class and identified himself, Ludwig remembers that retiring director Jan Simko and Fistler looked at his form and said in unison, “Can you be a DDRC?”

“I can’t even spell ‘DDRC’ and I don’t know what one is!” Ludwig replied.

The background information he provided on his form had identified Ludwig as a career veteran of the U.S. Navy’s Civil Engineer Corps.

“I was in the Seabees,” he explained. “Fast response was one of our primary purposes. The DDRC’s function in military terms would be a combination of S3 and S4—the operations guy and logistics person who sets everything up, organizes the camp, and is ready to go on short notice.

“So I pondered their request for a while, and then said, ‘I could move 725 guys from Mississippi all around the world for nine months and then come back home. I think I can move half a dozen church guys across the state of Tennessee to work for a few days and then come back home!’”

Together, Ludwig and Fistler seamlessly co-coordinate disaster response deployments, with Fistler overseeing the heavy equipment and immediate



Rev. Trae Fistler and Kurt Ludwig

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A GROWING Mid-South Ministry Support Program

In 2022, the Mid-South District launched a ministry support program called GROW Grants. When a Mid-South congregation or school has a great ministry or outreach concept that needs a financial “boost” to get started, a GROW Grant can help! So far, GROW Grants have helped Mid-South District ministries start community food pantries, expand Parents’ Day Out programs, establish “English as a second language” classes, start Bible study and life-skill classes for school children, connect with the community through music ministry and SO much more! One GROW Grant can provide up to \$15,000 in funding for an innovative outreach idea. Since the program’s inception, over \$150,000 in grants have been shared with Mid-South ministries! You can learn more about the program and ministry projects that have received GROW Grants at mid-southlcms.org/grow-grants/.

GROW
Grants



disaster recovery aspect of their mission, while Ludwig manages the disaster relief aspect, focusing on providing resources and disbursing grants to help people get their lives back together. Both are proficient at swapping chores in the interest of efficiency, however, as the occasion may require.

THE PROCESS, PRIORITIES, & RESOURCES AT WORK

While the Mid-South District has 150 volunteers, across the Synod the number of trained LERT volunteers is between 10,000 and 20,000, Fistler estimates. "The Synod also has a cohort group of guys on 15 to 20 teams that have the time and experience to do this pretty regularly. Those are teams from Chicago, Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma, Florida, North and South Carolina—all across the country."

These teams and individuals respond through www.lcms-lert.org, the website where DDRCs can set up deployments by sharing information about the work that needs to be done, the timetable, the number of volunteers needed, etc.

"I might bring only two guys from our district," says Fistler. "There might be two from Iowa and two from Indiana—but then we've got two full three-man crews that can respond and work. The website allows us to share resources and volunteers across Synod, which is extremely helpful."

But when a call is received from the pastor in a disaster-stricken community within the Mid-South District, Ludwig and Fistler work together to determine the extent of the damage and how many people are affected. They schedule a meeting with the pastor as soon as the area is safe to access, with power restored and roads cleared.

During this preliminary meeting with the pastor, church leaders, emergency management agencies,

and county or state officials (if necessary), they determine (1) if the pastor was affected; (2) if the church or its staff or congregation members were affected; (3) if any family members of congregants were affected; (4) how was the rest of the community affected?

"Those are our protocols for priority," Fistler explains. "We want the pastor to be able to get back to preaching and serving his people as soon as possible. Then we want the church to be able to be open to the community and minister to their needs. Then we want to care for our church members as well, before working our way out into the community."

Usually, the team is able to respond within 24 hours, as long as no rescue or recovery operations are still ongoing; within their own areas, they've been on-scene at tornado disasters within a couple of hours.

Ludwig points out that it depends on the scale of the disaster and the amount of damage it has left behind it.

"In a recent case we went down to help our partners in the Georgia-Florida District after Hurricane Helene. The FLGA District was overcome with requests just within the state of Florida, so Synod asked us to go to Valdosta, Georgia, and cover a piece of that area.

"When I arrived it was still a mess, with many of the roads still blocked, and there was no electric power, so it took 4 or 5 days after I got there before power was restored in the host church so we could move our volunteers in and they'd have a place to sleep and eat and shower. In that case, it took quite a while; in other cases it was just a case of 'drive in and go to work.'"

> Look for *PART 2 of this story in the 6-14-25 edition of the Bedrock Buzz.*

How to help Mid-South Disaster Relief

VOLUNTEER:

Go to www.lcms-lert.org, sign up and receive notifications for trainings and deployments.

CONTACT:

Kurt Ludwig at kjludwig@msn.com or 901-304-0809

Rev. Trae Fistler at pastor@faithhopkinsville.com or 515-571-1378

SUPPORT:

Mail to the Mid-South District Disaster Relief efforts and expenses by mailing your check payable to the Mid-South District and designated for the 'Disaster Relief Fund', addressing it to Mid-South District, 1675 Wynne Road, Cordova, TN 38016. Give Online on the District website mid-southlcms.org and hit the GIVE button.

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THANK YOU TO OUR CHAPLAIN OF THE DAY, Rev. Adam Woldt

Rev. Adam Woldt from The Point in Knoxville, Tennessee served as Friday's Chaplain of the Day, providing the opening devotion before delegates launched into the first official business of the 22nd Regular Convention. He also shared an apt prayer with the delegation prior to the first elections of the day.

A graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Pastor Woldt has served in the Mid-South District since 2017 when he was called to The Point. He and his wife, Laura, have three children.

Thank you, Pastor Woldt, for serving as Chaplain of the Day!



Rev. Adam Woldt